

James Laws House
818 Dayton Street
Cincinnati
Hamilton County
Ohio

HABS No. OH-2200-D

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

JAMES LAWS HOUSE

HABS
OH-772200-D
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Location: 818 Dayton Street, Cincinnati,
Hamilton County, Ohio

Within the Dayton Street Historic District, USGS
Covington Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: 16.713800.4332700, 16.713780.4332230.
16.713250.4332410 and 16.713110.4332750

Present Owner: Lester and Alice Ward

Present Occupant: Lester and Alice Ward and tenants.

Present Use: Private dwelling.

Significance: This is a large, elegant house typical of the more costly later nineteenth century townhouses built in Cincinnati. It is one of several such houses built at the same time with comparable facades in what is now designated the Dayton Street Historic Interest Area, and is important as part of the architectural context of its time and place.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The house stands on a parcel of land originally sold on October 13, 1794 to Jonathan Dayton of Elizabethtown, New Jersey, for \$42,987.00 by John Cleves Symmes, who obtained the original patent for the Miami Purchase from the United States Congress.

William Henry Harrison, ninth President of the United States, on October 1, 1818, as an executor of the estate of Symmes, and as then Governor of the Indiana Territory, re-negotiated the sale, inasmuch as the original deed was said to have been lost. Because of the riots and fire of 1884, the records contained in the Hamilton County Court House were either partially or totally destroyed, thus making the present records an incomplete source of information. It is known from the remaining records that Andrew G. Burt assembled the present parcel of land when he purchased the easternmost portion on August 18, 1856. The purchase date of the westernmost portion has been lost through a recording error in the Deed Books. Burt sold the entire property on October 18, 1859. The Laws family was prominently associated with the house, following James Laws's purchase of the property on December 3, 1864. His heirs sold the property on July 29, 1907.

2. Date of erection: The house appears to have been built after October 18, 1859.
3. Architect: Unknown.

4. Alterations and additions: None of any apparent significance.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the House:

Annie and Alice Laws, daughters of James Laws from whom they inherited the house, are the persons with whom this house is most notably associated. Annie, the better known of the two, was born on January 20, 1855. She was a member of many civic and charitable organizations, not only local and state, but also national. She is best known as the founder in 1879 of the Cincinnati Kindergarten Association. Because of her efforts, the first free kindergarten was established in 1880. In 1889 she founded what is now known as the School of Nursing of the University of Cincinnati. From 1892 to 1894 she was President of the Women's Columbian Exposition Association of Cincinnati and vicinity. She was founder of the Cincinnati Women's Club. In 1910 she founded what was called the School of Household Administration that is now part of Teachers College of the University of Cincinnati. She died on October 8, 1927. Her sister, Alice, was born on July 5, 1862. She was a member of various organizations and followed in her sister's footsteps. She died on May 3, 1946, and was the last of her family, as neither sister married. They were descendants of a Reverend Thomas Lawes, who was a doctor of civil laws and who received a grant of a coat of arms from Elizabeth I of England in 1584. The present spelling of the family name was adopted shortly after 1753.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: None known.
2. Bibliography:

Purchases by Andrew Burt: Deed Book 227, Page 460 and
Deed Book 235, Page 64

Sale by Andrew Burt: Deed Book 254, Page 601.

All of the information on Annie and Alice Laws is contained in the material on the Laws family in the possession of the Cincinnati Historical Society.

Prepared by: Carl A. Saladino
Project Historian
National Park Service
August, 1974

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This structure has one of the simplest facades on Dayton Street. With a common brick front, and stone quoins and architraves, it is the only asymmetrical four-bay house on the street.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: This structure measuring approximately 40'-0" by 45'-0" has two stories plus a low attic.
2. Foundations: Brick and stone.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The common brick, at one time painted red, is now peeling.
4. Structural system, framing: Masonry bearing walls.
5. Porches, stoops: There are limestone steps leading to the entrance stoop. There are stone balconies with wrought-iron railings fronting the first-floor windows.
6. Chimneys: There are three brick chimneys. Two are in the exterior side walls, and one is in the interior west bearing wall.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The recessed front entry contains paired doors which are not original. The doorway has a simple molded stone surround.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Double-hung sash with stone enframements in front only. Sash are one-over-one light in front wall, and two-over-two and six-over-six-light elsewhere.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:
 - a. Basement: A number of storage rooms and a furnace room.
 - b. First floor: Asymmetrical center hall plan with two large rooms (plus a bath addition) on the west side. A front room separated from two rear rooms (and a later bath addition) by a service stair which goes from the basement to the third floor on the east side. The bath additions are taken from the corners of rooms, as the building is now divided into a series of apartments.

- c. Second floor: Originally this floor contained bed chambers. It now contains apartments and is divided in the same manner as the first floor.
 - d. Attic: Originally this floor probably contained servants' quarters. It is now an apartment with room arrangement similar to the first two floors except for the area above the center hall, which extends through the second floor only. A dining area and a small area for access to the roof are above the hall.
2. Stairways: The side service stair runs from basement to attic. The stair in the center hall ascends to a landing at the rear wall with a four step return from the landing to the second floor. The balusters and handrail are hardwood.
 3. Flooring: The original wooden floors are now covered with linoleum, carpet, etc. The center hall floor of 3"-wide pine boards is heavily worn.
 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Painted plaster. There have been some additions of acoustical tile attached by adhesive.
 5. Doorways and doors: Large four-panel wooden doors have molded hardwood architraves. There are latticed transoms with evidence of portiere rods in many openings.
 6. Decorative features and trim: There are marble mantelpieces in the major first and second-floor rooms. The best preserved one is in the first-floor west front parlor. Interior wooden shutters divided horizontally fold back into pockets in the jamb of each window.
 7. Notable hardware: None.
 8. Mechanical equipment: None.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Located on the north side of Dayton Street, this house is one of the larger houses in what was once known as "Millionaires' Row."
2. Outbuildings: Brick carriage house at rear of lot

Prepared by: J. William Rudd
Project Supervisor
National Park Service
August, 1974

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These data are part of the documentation made during the 1974 Cincinnati Project undertaken by HABS in cooperation with the Miami Purchase Association and City of Cincinnati. Records were made of a part of the Dayton Street Historic interest Area of the City of Cincinnati.

The project was under the general supervision of John Poppeliers, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. The project supervisor was J. William Rudd of the University of Cincinnati. The project historian was Carl A. Saladino of the Ohio State University. The measured drawings for the project were prepared by architects Steven B. Kells (University of Cincinnati) and Richard Wyatt (California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo), and student assistant architects William Maxwell Miller (University of Pennsylvania) and Osbourne K. Simms III (University of Illinois, Chicago Circle). The photographs were taken by HABS photographer Jack E. Boucher in July 1982.